

Remarks by Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN04)
Bread for the World Advocacy Day
June 13, 2006

Good morning. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to join you this morning.

Bread for the World is a wonderful organization and I love receiving your letters in my office. Please keep writing – it makes a difference as you will see today on your office visits.

Thank you for being here in Washington. Today, you are lobbyists. Not the slick, \$500 an hour lobbyist – but the real thing, the citizen lobbyist motivated by passion and commitment, tasked to advocate for issues of importance to our nation, and paid at the end of the day with nothing more than sore feet and a sense of satisfaction.

Thank you for being here and thank you for caring. Hundreds of millions of our brothers and sisters around the world are counting on us and our country to be generous, wise and courageous. Most of all, they are counting on us to recognize the fact that their lives are valuable and their pursuit for human dignity is also our cause.

You are here today walking the halls of Congress – the legislative body of the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. Everything we do here in Congress is about setting priorities, making choices and investing in the future. It is our duty, as citizens, to work to ensure that the priorities, choices and investments Congress makes reflect the values that our faith teaches us.

We are all here today because we believe our work – this very important work – is an extension of our faith. We are here today to put our faith, our convictions, and our tax dollars to work to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to comfort the dying, to educate children, to empower the ignored, and to inspire hope in every corner of our planet.

The United States – our president, this Congress and the American people, each of us, we have the power to lead the fight to eliminate extreme poverty, to save the lives of millions of newborns, to overcome the devastating human suffering caused by AIDS. We have the power to invest in solutions that will end food insecurity, keep girls in school, promote healthy families, and make a more peaceful world.

Today, you will gain some insight into whether your member of Congress is willing to offer their voices and their votes to invest our nation's resources towards saving lives, promoting peace and building a better future for our planet's most vulnerable people?

Many of my colleagues are committed and I know this because ninety-nine of my House colleagues have co-sponsored H. Con. Res. 172, a resolution I introduced last

year that commits the U.S. to be actively leading to help achieve the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is my belief that the United States has the ability, the resources and the moral obligation to reach out to the world, in partnership with other developed nations, and make the financial investments needed to achieve the MDGs by 2015. To reach these goals, we must demand that our leaders in Washington serve the interests of the American people, as well as the human race, by investing in poverty focused development assistance.

Can we afford these investments? Let me ask the question another way.

As Americans, as Christians, as our brother's keeper, can we afford to stand by and watch comfortably, passively, as 1.3 billion people around the world struggle for survival on a dollar a day – living in misery and fear and hopelessness?

Can we stand by cheerfully and know that today ... today, 30,000 parents around the world watched their children die from preventable and treatable diseases?

Can we sleep peacefully knowing that today thousands of children became orphans because their parent died of AIDS?

In our world today, as entire countries, communities and families confront extreme poverty, AIDS, natural disasters, famine and conflict – millions of Americans believe the United States must be a responsible super-“partner” – as well as superpower and leader of the free world.

It is in our nation's interest to invest in child survival, HIV prevention, safe motherhood, training health workers and birth attendants, expanding micro enterprise programs and sustainable agriculture. These are the investments that defeat poverty, defeat disease and defeat despair.

As citizens of a nation that has been blessed with a bounty unknown to any other country in human history, it shouldn't be considered an act of political courage for Congress to vote to increase funding for girls' education, to keep mothers and newborns healthy, or expand access to safe drinking water.

Why are massive investments in saving lives and enhancing human dignity more controversial for Members of Congress than spending \$7 billion every month for a war in Iraq?

It is time for Congress to look out and see the world as it really is – interconnected, interdependent, and filled with a common human desire for hope, opportunity and respect – especially among those who have the least.

I am committed to working to add my voice to the millions of Americans – voices like yours – who care deeply about achieving the MDGs – because to do so reflects our faith, our values, and our interests as Americans.

Last year, in November, I had the opportunity to travel to Malawi and I arrived in that small African nation on Thanksgiving Day. Malawi is a nation in which poverty, hunger and AIDS are combined with environmental destruction to keep virtually every family in a chronic state of crisis.

The people I met were warm, hard working, but poor and desperate. AIDS has created a country in which orphans live in almost every house and in many mud huts there are only orphans – children raising children. Never before had I seen the faces – looked into the eyes – of starvation, absolute desperation and fear. In the eyes of mothers with hungry children I saw a terror just as deadly and real as the violent terror our nation is fighting around the world.

I raise my experience in Malawi because here is a small, poor nation that needs help. They are not asking for hundreds of millions of dollars for fighter aircraft, weapons systems or strategic military assistance. They are asking for help, for a partner to join their fight against poverty, hunger, and disease.

Like so many other African countries, they need to have access to AIDS treatment, clean water and enough food so parents can get well and go back into their fields and their children do not become orphans, but instead go back to school.

And in Malawi, across Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East – governments and a new generation of young people with limitless potential are looking to the United States, to Congress and the American people for help, hope and the opportunity to stop surviving and start living.

This, my friends, is a fight worth fighting. This is a just cause and a cause worthy of our prayers, our perseverance and, something politics is rarely about any more, our love.

You have my full support and my commitment to work to extend and expand our government's investments – real money – to defeat poverty, defeat disease, defeat despair. Tens of millions of people living in extreme poverty could be lifted out of misery and an endless cycle of survival if we choose to give their lives value – if we choose to invest in their human capacity and dignity.

They have my vote – and so do you.

Thank you for all the work you are doing as members of Bread for the World.

Thank you.